A

SERMON

Preach'd in the

Pariſh-Church of St. *Botolph Aldgate*,

ON

Sunday the 28th of *October*, 1705.

BEING

The Day of the Quarterly Collection for the POOR CHILDREN, who are Cloath'd and Taught at the Charge of ſome Charitable Perſons in that PARISH.

Publiſh'd at the Requeſt of the Treaſurer and Stewards for that Charity.

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One of the Six Preaching Chaplains in Ordinary to Her Majeſty at *Whitehall*.

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A

SERMON

JAM. 1. 27.

Pure Religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to Visit the Fatherless and Widows in their Affliction.

BEcauſe I would not entertain you with Diſcourſes foreign to the Subject I am to ſpeak to, I ſhall ſay nothing either of the Author, Occaſion, Time, or Subject Matter of this Epiſtle in general; nor meddle with the Coherence of theſe Words with the Context in particular; nor offer to Criticize either upon the *Greek* Word here Tranſlated *Religion*, or upon the Epithets of *Pure* and *Undefiled*, which the Text attributes to it: No, nor laſtly, make any Remarks upon that Form of Speech here uſed, *before God and the Father.*

The Words I have read, without more ado, do reſolve a Queſtion, which is ſure, one of the moſt important and neceſſary for us to be rightly inform'd about; and that is, in what it is that God Almighty has eſpecially plac'd the Nature of True Religion; *viz.* not in any unintelligible Spiritual Union to, or Communion with Chriſt; not in any Enthuſiaſtick Fervours, Religious Extaſies or Raptures; not in wearing the Livery or Cognizance of Baptiſm, in being call'd by the Name of Chriſtian, or in having a Real Hiſtorical Faith in

the Holy Jeſus; much leſs is it in good Diſcourſe, in talking and ſpeaking of God and Religion; leſs than that is it in preciſe Grimace, in Eyes and Hands on all Occaſions lift up to Heaven, in *touch not*, *taſte not*, *handle not*; and laſtly, leaſt of all is it in Maſſes, Indulgences and Pilgrimages, in a conſtant Obſervance of Feaſts and Faſts; in wearing the Habit, and confining ones ſelf to the Rules and Orders of the Monks and Regulars with the utmoſt Exactneſs. Theſe and ſuch like may, and we know do, paſs with ſeveral, as the very Characters of the choiceſt Saints; and ſo groſly ignorant, or egregiouſly corrupt, is a great part of the World grown in theſe Matters, that they are look'd upon as the only certain infallible Signs of the *Elect*.

But however deceiv'd Mankind may be by theſe Pretences, God Almighty is not to be ſo put off, or mocked. As Superſtition has ſtrain'd the Nature of Religion too high, ſo Ignorance, Errour and Hypocriſy, have debas'd it too low; and our Apoſtle had certainly one or both of theſe ſorts in his view, when he wrote this Epiſtle; *viz.* that there were great Errors in that Age, relating both to the Nature of Religion in general, and to ſome of the principal Duties and Articles of it: And therefore he tells us, in the Verſe next before my Text, that ſome *ſeem'd to be Religious*, but were not ſo; that is, impos'd their Hypocriſy either upon themſelves or upon the reſt of the World for real Goodneſs: To correct which Miſtake, he tells us in the Text, and the Words following, that *before God and the Father*, that is, in the Sight, Eſteem and Appointment of God, the true Religion conſiſts chiefly in two Things; *viz.* in *Beneficence*, *Acts of Mercy and Charity to the Poor and Diſtreſſed, and in Purity or Uprightneſs of Heart and Life with reſpect to ones ſelf: In viſiting the Fatherleſs and Widows in their Affliction*, and

and in keeping ones ſelf unſpotted from the World. He that had not theſe, whatever Opinion Mankind might have of his Sanctity and Goodneſs, had not *Religion* enough; and he that had theſe, in the Eſteem and Appointment of God Almighty, needed not much more.

'Tis only the firſt of theſe two, *viz.* that of *Mercy or Charity to the Poor and Diſtreſſed*, of which I ſhall now treat. In ſpeaking to which, it will not be expected that I ſhould confine this *Charity* only to the *Widows and Orphans*, which are the Objects the Text only mentions; much leſs that I ſhould follow the Text in limiting the Charity we owe to ſuch, only to the *Viſiting* of them. Though no more is mentioned as to both theſe, there is a great deal more implied; and when the Text places ſo much of Religion therein, as it does, we may be ſure it intends to include Mercy and Charity to them, in the very utmoſt Latitude and Extent. In ſpeaking thereto, I ſhall therefore ſhew,

Firſt, What that Mercy and Charity is which we owe to the Poor and Diſtreſſed.

Secondly, How very material, neceſſary and eſſential a part of Religion, this is. And,

Thirdly, Make ſome Application of the whole, ſuitable to the Deſign I am now upon.

Firſt, Then, What is that Mercy and Charity which we chiefly owe to the Poor and Diſtreſſed?

Charity, we know, as it is the moſt beneficial, ſo is it the moſt comprehenſive Vertue of any other. It relates to the Mind and to the Body, to the Affections and the Judgment; and when it has *its perfect Work*, as the Apoſtle phraſes it, that is, is in Compleatneſs and Perfection, as it inſpires and invigorates the whole Man,

Man, ſo does it extend to all the Troubles and Afflictions, to all the Sins and Infirmities, to all the Wants and Diſtreſſes of our Fellow Creatures; not only Friends, but Enemies, are incircled within its Sphere; 'twill do all the Good it can to all, and not willingly be the Occaſion of the leaſt Hurt or Prejudice to any; 'twill repine at no Trouble, ſtop at no Difficulty, nor be diſcouraged by any Danger, when 'tis running its courſe, and in order to its Duty: Good and evil Report 'tis indifferently prepared for; and though it foreſees that the moſt Ignominious Cenſures will be its Portion, yet even that cannot deter it from doing Good. In fine, Where a Charitable Man cannot do all the Good that he would, he will do all the Good that he can; and where he cannot in his own Perſon be Beneficent, he will ſtrive, with the utmoſt application, to find out and ſtir up others that can; and where he can neither be ſerviceable by Perſon nor Proxy, he will lament his Miſfortune for the Incapacity he is under, be concern'd for the Calamity of his Brother, beg of God to give him Patience to bear it; by Sanctifying to turn it to ſome greater Good, and wait for ſome more favourable conjuncture, in which he may do him that real Service, which he could now only wiſh, endeavour, and intend. In ſhort, if you would have a general account of Charity, ſee the Deſcription of it by St. *Paul* in 1 *Cor.* 13. 4, 5, 6, 7. *Charity ſuffers long, and is kind; envies not; does not behave it ſelf unſeemly, ſeeketh not her own, is not eaſily provoked, thinketh no evil, beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, and endureth all things.* This is Charity in the utmoſt Latitude and Extent; that Charity of which ſo great Elogiums are given in Scripture; which is the Life of Religion, the Characteriſtick of a good and a perfect Man, and the peculiar

peculiar Badge of a Diſciple of the Holy Jeſus. That part of this excellent Vertue, which is due to the Poor and Diſtreſſed, does eſpecially conſiſt in theſe Particulars.

1. In not Deſpiſing or Slighting.
2. In not Cenſuring or Reproaching.
3. But in Viſiting.
4. In Comforting. And,
5. In Relieving.

1. In not Deſpiſing or Slighting them. This, I confeſs, if it may be properly ſaid, is but a negative part of Charity; but if we conſider, how apt we are to deſpiſe thoſe who are Poor and Diſtreſſed, and that this Contempt naturally miſleads us to overlook, and take no notice of them, we cannot but think it neceſſary to remove this Obſtacle out of our way, before we can diſcharge thoſe Charitable Offices towards them which are incumbent upon us: For nothing is plainer, than that thoſe we do not think worthy of our Eſteem, we do not, ordinarily, think worthy of our Notice, and eſpecially that whom we deſpiſe, that them of courſe we overlook. Hence it is that the Proud or Diſdainful, and Charitable Man, are ſeldom conjoin'd in one and the ſame Perſon: He cannot debaſe his Mind ſo low as once to fix it on ſuch mean ſcoundrel Objects; the Condeſcenſion is too great for ſuch a brave aſpiring Soul, and once to ſpend a Thought upon them, much leſs to afford them the leaſt ſhare of his Care and Regard, is ſuch a diminution to his Grandeur, as he can by no means admit of. Hence it is that he has no Bowels of Compaſſion for the Poor and Miſerable: They may Starve, Periſh, and at laſt Dye in their Wants and

and Troubles, for any Morſels of Comfort or Relief they are to expect from him.

On which account, if we ever intend that the Poor and Diſtreſſed ſhould be much the better for us; if we would, *give a Portion to Six and alſo to Seven*, not have the imputation of Uncharitableneſs upon us while we live, or the Guilt and Horrour of it gnaw our Conſciences when we dye, we muſt not contemn or ſcorn any, how mean and deſpicable ſoever they may be in themſelves.

And ſure we may eaſily ſee good Reaſon for, and conſequently be the readier inclin'd to this.

Haſt thou any thing of Humanity in thee? Conſider then, that they are Men as well as thee, of the ſame Rational Nature, fitted with Abilities both of Body and Mind to be both as great and uſeful Members of the Common-wealth as thy ſelf; and if they either never had, or at preſent want, thoſe Advantages which make thee ſhine and flouriſh, canſt thou not careſs thy ſelf in thine own Happineſs, without upbraiding and deſpiſing them for their Misfortune? What though they are harm'd! does it therefore follow that they ſhould be ſcorn'd too? And is it any reaſon, that becauſe they are *down*, they ſhould therefore be trampled and ſpit upon? Again, Art thou a Man of Reaſon, of Judgment and Foreſight? If ſo, thou oughteſt to conſider the Inſtability of Fortune, and Uncertainty of this World; that both their and thy Condition may be alter'd, and that when you come to change Stations, by thine own Rule, that ſame Contempt, thou now caſteſt on them, will belong juſtly to thy ſelf.

Laſtly, Art thou a Chriſtian? Conſider then that they are of the very ſame Profeſſion, both Servants to the

the ſame common Lord and Maſter, and that no external Circumſtances are the leaſt Title to his Favour and Acceptance: If then they are equally capable of the ſame Heavenly Kingdom and Glory with thy ſelf; nay, if, to outward appearance, they are in a fairer way to be for ever happy than thou art, they having their Evil, and thou thy Good Things in this Life; doſt thou not ſee that this Contempt is wretchedly miſplac'd, and that thy Condition being extreamly worſe, and more unhappy than theirs, does juſtly entitle thee to that very Contempt which thou moſt unjuſtly caſteſt on them? Beſides, who can read that dreadful Paſſage, *Luke* 10. 16. *He that deſpiſeth you deſpiſeth me*, and yet dare to be guilty of this Practice? *Job* tells us, *ch.* 36. 5. *That God is mighty, and yet deſpiſeth not any.* How then can they who pretend any deference to his Authority and Example, and yet compar'd with him *are as nothing, yea, leſs than nothing and vanity*; I ſay, how can ſuch dare to act counter to ſo Divine a Pattern? All which Circumſtances conſider'd, and eſpecially the mighty obſtacle it is to Charity and Beneficence, we ſhould take great care not to deſpiſe any, though never ſo poor and diſtreſſed.

2. If we would be Charitable to ſuch, we muſt not reproach and cenſure them; becauſe our ſo doing is a very great act of Uncharitableneſs towards them; 'tis adding Affliction to the afflicted, *perſecuting* thoſe whom God has ſmitten, and caſting our Gall and Vinegar into their Potion, which is already, God knows, bitter enough; beſides, ſuch Cenſures naturally prevent all other kind Offices towards them: We cannot be ſuppoſed to do Good to thoſe, of whom we have publiſh'd ſo bad an Opinion and Character; ſeeing this would

be to contradict our Words by our Deeds, and be a publick acknowledgment of our Miſtake, by making them ſuch Satisfaction for the Injury we have done them. Hence it is that the old way has always been to caſt Dirt on thoſe who have a juſt title to our Kindneſs, but yet are ſuch whom we have no mind to ſhew Kindneſs to: For when once a Man is dreſs'd up, as we ſay, in the ſhape of a Devil, all People allow you to ſtand at the utmoſt diſtance from ſo frightful a picture; for which reaſon it is, as well as others, that the Apoſtle tells us, that *Charity thinketh no evil*; that is, it entertains no hard thoughts of the Man, becauſe of the Diſtreſſes he is under, but induſtriouſly avoids them, becauſe he would not have any pretence or covert for Uncharitableneſs towards them.

3. Another act of Charity we owe to the Poor and Diſtreſſed, is, to Viſit them; and when the Apoſtle in the Text expreſſes the whole of thoſe kind Offices we owe to ſuch poor Creatures, by this particular Inſtance, we may be aſſur'd that he plac'd no inconſiderable part of our Charity towards them in it. Not that this is always a neceſſary, eſſential part of Charity; it may in many, perhaps in moſt caſes be omitted, and yet if other good Offices be perform'd towards them, God forbid, that that omiſſion ſhould occaſion any material Defect in ſuch Charity. Then only is it neceſſary, when it is to do them any real Good, when their Condition ſtands in need of our Preſence, and that our ſending to them will not do, or at leaſt not ſo well, as when we come in Perſon. In ſuch caſes, Perſonal Viſits become Eſſential Parts of Charity; and he that thinks much of his Time, or his Pains, or his Attendance, though he be never ſo liberal in his Purſe, is as much defective in his

Charity,

Charity, as though he did not ſpare one ſingle Penny to their Support.

4. Another Act of Mercy and Charity due to the Poor and Diſtreſſed, is, to comfort them: And indeed when the Apoſtle, in the Text, mentions *Viſiting* ſuch People, he does it with this further view, that thereby we may have better Opportunity to adminiſter ſuch Comforts and Encouragements to them, as we find their Condition calls moſt for.

And ſure this is one of the moſt noble and uſeful Acts of Mercy and Charity we can poſſible ſhew to the Poor and Diſtreſſed; becauſe, though it be not always fitted wholly to remove their Miſery, 'tis yet, in many caſes, the only thing that can be done for them; and if it be ſeaſonably and prudently applyed, may make their Miſery at leaſt tolerable, and ſometimes even light and eaſy to them.

Alas, the greateſt Afflictions of Human Life do not ordinarily conſiſt in any Bodily Wants or Pains: 'Tis the Melancholick Reflections a Man makes on them in his own Mind, thoſe Horrors and Agonies of Soul he conceives about them, when he forms black and fearful Ideas, torments himſelf about their cauſes, conſequences, and continuance; and, in ſhort, loſeth his Reaſon, his Hope and his Confidence, giving himſelf up to nought but Diffidence and Deſpair. Theſe, and ſuch like, are the great Stings of Affliction, what the Wiſe Man calls *a wounded Spirit*, and which, though they be the very great Infirmity and Indiſcretion, and what ought not by any means to be indulg'd, yet ſo poor and mean a thing is Human Nature, that they are the uſual effects of great and repeared, of long and tedious Troubles and Diſtreſſes. Now to *ſpeak a word in ſeaſon* to ſuch

People,

People, and to pour Oyl into theſe Wounds, is the Office of the good *Samaritan*. Every Chriſtian, of the Laity as well as Clergy, is to turn Divine, Philoſopher, Friend and Phyſician in ſuch caſes; and by applying the true *Balm that is in Gilead*, ſuch Ghoſtly Comfort and Advice as they are furniſh'd with, and as the particular caſe requires, they are to endeavour to ſtop theſe Vapours and Hypochondriack, and to reduce the perplex'd and diſturb'd Soul to greater Eaſe and Quiet: And how excellent a Duty this is, we may learn from hence, that it is the very Character given of our Saviour, that *he ſhould not break the bruiſed Reed, nor quench the ſmoaking Flax*; and the particular Title attributed to the Bleſſed Spirit, is that of *the Comforter*. And if Two of the Perſons in the Sacred Trinity gloried in this particular Act of Mercy and Charity, ſure we ſhould think it our great Honour, as it is our incumbent Duty, to imitate their Example in this matter.

5. The laſt Inſtance I mention'd of Mercy and Charity to the Poor and Diſtreſſed, is to Supply or Relieve their Wants and Neceſſities. Indeed without this, all our other Charities become very defective; they are but like ſaying to the Poor, *be ye warm'd, cloath'd and fed*, without contributing wherewithal to enable them thereto. Craving Wants are never to be ſupplyed by empty Wiſhes, however ſo kind and good; and many a poor Wretch has, no doubt, miſerably ſtarved, in the midſt of thouſands, who have all wiſh'd him a better Fate. This ſort of Diſtreſſes can never be remedied but by actual Supplies, and our Duty of Charity to the Poor does expreſly oblige us to contribute ſomething to their Relief.

As to the Quota of this Charity, or what Proportion each one ought to give, the Holy Scripture does not

not expreſly determine; it ſeems to leave that to the different circumſtances of each particular Perſon; only it ſays ſo much, as both to encourage the ſmalleſt Charity, and at the ſame time, excites all People to give as much as they well can. There have been various Schemes which Devout and Charitable People have propos'd to themſelves in this matter.

For Inſtance, Some have thought that a Tenth Part of their Yearly Gain, after all Charges and Loſſes are deducted, ought to be applyed this way: And this is ſure no bad Rule in the general; and yet, as in many caſes where the Profits are ſmall, and the Children and Family many and large, it may be too much; ſo in others, where the Expences are extravagant, and Idleneſs and Luxury are the ſole Obſtacles to Thriving and Increaſe, it may be too little. Others therefore have propoſed ſuch a certain Fortune, which, when they are once Maſters of, they deſign never to be richer, but apply whatever Surpluſage God gives wholly in Acts of Charity. And this too muſt be own'd to be a Rule not diſcommendable: But then it will not be deny'd, that there are theſe Hazards and Dangers in it: The Fortune propos'd may poſſible never be attain'd; and if the Man is never to beſtow any thing in Charity till it be, he is never to be Charitable at all. Beſides, a truly good Man would hardly truſt himſelf ſo far, as to be confident of keeping his Reſolution in ſuch a Caſe, as knowing what the common Infirmity of Humane Nature is, *viz.* that the Love of Money increaſes, as the Money it ſelf does: And indeed, if it ſhould increaſe, as it poſſible may even beyond expectation, would it be ſo adviſeable to beſtow ſuch large Sums purely in Acts of Charity, as it would to give them elſewhere? And I will only add, that but forming a Suppoſition of having

ſuch an Eſtate, may be as the caſe ſhall happen, ſuch a Preſumption, as is neither fit, nor prudent, nor lawful to make.

I might mention other Schemes of the ſame nature; moſt of which have their conveniencies and inconveniencies attending them; for the ſake of which, perhaps it may be thought adviſeable, to fix no other Rule for our Charity but this; *viz.* To reſolve always to be Charitable according to our Power, and to proportion the Quantum by the beſt Rules of Judging we can form, and as Objects, Occaſions and Opportunities offer themſelves.

As to the Objects of this Charity, or who the Perſons be that are entitled to it, 'tis well known that they are the *Poor* in general; and though ſome are more, and others leſs Objects of Charity than the reſt, yet every Poor Man, Woman and Child, as ſuch, is juſtly and truly entitled to it.

The loweſt form of all is the *common Beggar*, whoſe idle, not to ſay wicked way of ſupporting himſelf, makes him, in the general, unworthy of ſo much as being admitted into the Liſt; and were it not for ſome few lamentable Inſtances indeed of this ſort, who ought to be conſider'd, the reſt are ſo far from being Objects of Charity, that the greateſt Charity we can do them, is firſt to ſhut up our Hands and Purſes from them, and then to execute the Laws upon them.

Next to theſe, are ſuch Poor as receive Weekly Penſions from the Pariſh: Such publick Relief does not diſcharge our private Charities towards them; becauſe 'tis always ſcanty, but a half ſupply; and though they may not want the bare Neceſſaries of Life, they generally do thoſe of Comfort and Refreſhment.

Next to theſe are thoſe Poor Private Perſons and Families who are within our Knowledge and Neighbourhood, who have nothing from the Publick Funds, and yet through Age, Sickneſs or other Misfortunes, are reduced to very great Streights. Theſe are generally noble Objects indeed; and though their different Education, way of Living and Employment, will make them more or leſs ſo, yet none of them but have a juſt and great Title to our Charity.

Add to theſe the Branches of our own Kindred, Family, Dependants, and the like, who have indeed a prior Title to all hitherto mention'd; and if after theſe there be any looſe Grains remaining, then to ſuch Publick Charities as ſhall offer themſelves, and to the preſent Support of ſuch, who by Fire, Shipwreck, or any ſuch Calamity, have not wherewithal to ſupport themſelves. And if when theſe are over, there be ſtill room left for more, then to publick Bodies and Buildings, to Hoſpitals, Schools, Churches, Univerſities, and ſuch like; in which our Charity generally ends, they being a perfect Abyſs, able to receive the utmoſt that can ordinarily be done for them.

The laſt thing proper to be mention'd on this Head, is the way and manner of Diſtributing our Charity. Upon which I would obſerve two things.

1. That it be done in our Life time. And,

2. That it be in ſuch a manner, as that the Poor may receive the moſt and the greateſt Benefit by it.

1. The firſt is, That it be done in our Life-time. 'Tis true, where a Man, while he lives, does Acts of Charity in ſome proportion to his Abilities, and at his Death leaves great and generous Charities, as ſuppoſe all or the greateſt part of his Eſtate, in ſuch a caſe his Conduct ſeems very juſtifyable and commendable too; for

as

as all Men are oblig'd to Charity, ſo is it very allowable that it ſhould begin at home; and there is no Obligation on any Man to reduce himſelf to Streights while he lives, when he deſigns to do ſuch great and noble things at his Death.

Again, If a Man have not done that Good he ought in his Life-time, to do it at his Death is much better than not to do it at all; and in ſuch a caſe a Death-bed Charity is ſomewhat like a Death-bed Repentance; 'tis doing all the Man can do in his Circumſtances; and whether it make the ſame Atonement for his former Uncharitableneſs, which he ſuppoſes the other will make for his Impenitence; I ſay, whether it do or not, he has yet laid himſelf under an abſolute neceſſity of doing it.

But then in other caſes, the general Rule holds good, that there is the ſame Obligation on us, to be Charitable in our Life-time, as there is to perform any other Duty; and if there be any Excuſes to be made, for deferring our Charity till the laſt, there are juſt the ſame, or at leaſt ſuch as are equivalent, for our deferring all the reſt till then. If the diſcharge of other Duties will yield us preſent Peace and Comfort, (which is an inducement to perform them early in our Life-time) I dare challenge an Inſtance of any one, that can make the ſame Pretenſions to this, as Charity juſtly can, and if there be danger in putting off our Repentance, or any other Chriſtian Duty, till the laſt, upon the ſcore of the great uncertainty and hazard there is, that we may not perform it then, it will not be denied but that we run the very ſame Riſque as to our Charity.

Beſides, let a Death-bed Charity be never ſo large, 'tis, I think, in the Opinion both of God and Man, more than half diminiſh'd, by this conſideration, that we never did it while it was our own: We kept it to

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our ſelves as long as we poſſibly could; and when we could retain it no longer, rather than it ſhould fall into other hands, which perhaps we had no Kindneſs for, nay it may be a Prejudice againſt, we order'd it to the Poor after our Death; though I ſay the giving it this way, may poſſible in ſome few caſes be better than the other; yet ſeeing 'tis only a taking it from thoſe whom the Law had aſſign'd it to, who can tell whether the great Judge of the World will not interpret it rather their Charity than ours? And as it is only to their Loſs, ſo that it may not in the leaſt turn to our Gain.

2. The other Rule I mention'd in the Diſtribution of our Charity, is to do it in ſuch a way, as that the Poor may receive the moſt and the greateſt Benefit by it. Now as the Mind is better than the Body, and the Body and Mind both better than either ſingly, ſo a Charity that tends to improve the Mind and to cloath the Body too, is one of the beſt and moſt ſerviceable Charities that can be done; and though the Lame, and the Blind, and the Aged, are not to be neglected, but have their Charities proper and peculiar to them; yet all Things done that way, bear no proportion to the Care, Education and Cloathing of their Children; in as much as beſides the beſt and greateſt Service done both to Parents and Children by this means, 'tis a farther Service done to our Country and the Publick, by preventing Ignorance and Idleneſs both in the preſent and ſucceeding Generations, and putting ſo many into a condition to become uſeful Members of the Common-wealth, who otherwiſe might have been an Incumbrance, a Peſt, and a Nuiſance to it. I now proceed to the Second Thing:

Secondly, Which is to ſhew how very Material, Neceſſary and Eſſential a Part of Religion this is. For the

Text tells us, that *pure and undefiled Religion* does conſiſt in this Charity, in *Viſiting the Fatherleſs, &c.* as well as in the other part, of *keeping ones ſelf unſpotted from the World.*

Thus in almoſt all places, where the Epitomy or Summary of Religion is deſcrib'd, as well in the New as Old Teſtament, this Charity or Mercy is uſually mention'd as one Eſſential Part. See *Mic.* 6. 8. *He has ſhewed thee O Man what is good; and what does the Lord require of thee, but to do Juſtice, to love Mercy,* as well as *to walk humbly with thy God:* Where *loving Mercy,* or practiſing Works of Charity, from an inward Vital Principle of Love to God and Man, is term'd at leaſt one third part of Religion. So when our Saviour is mentioning the *two great Commandments, on which hang all the Law and the Prophets,* or in other words, thoſe in which Religion does chiefly conſiſt, *the loving our Neighbour as our ſelf,* that is, performing all Offices of Kindneſs, Mercy and Charity to him, is expreſſed as one of them, and that of equal force and value with the other. In other places, he ſtiles this *Love* or *Charity, the end of the Law, and the fulfilling of the Law;* that is, what the whole Scripture tended to, *viz.* the fulfilling of all that Religion and Righteouſneſs it preſcrib'd. Hence it is that *Daniel* directs the King of *Babylon* to turn from an ill to a good Man, by what? Why, by being Charitable: *Break off thy Iniquities,* ſays he, *by ſhewing Mercy to the Poor,* Dan. 4. 27. And to this purpoſe 'tis obſervable, that what in one of the Evangeliſts is tranſlated *merciful,* is in another render'd *perfect.* Be ye merciful ſays one, and perfect ſays another, even as your Father which is in Heaven is merciful and perfect. Compare *Mat.* 5. 48. with *Luke* 6. 36. To ſhew that Mercy and Charity are the greateſt Perfections, the neareſt Imitations of God, and

and moſt perfect Parts of Religion: And even in the Jewiſh State, though Sacrifice was one of the moſt conſiderable eſſential parts of their Religion, yet the Prophet *Hoſea* 6. 6. tells us, that *I deſir'd Mercy and not Sacrifice*; that is, God always prefer'd Works of Mercy and Charity before it. Add to theſe that famous paſſage, St. *Mat.* 25. 31. and ſo on; where you have the method of procedure at the Day of Judgment very pathetically repreſented; 'tis only the diſcharge or neglect of this ſingle Duty of Charity alone, I and of that part of it only that relates to the Poor and Diſtreſſed, that is aſſign'd as the particular reaſon of the final Condition, and different Fate of all People; *In as much as ye did it or did it not to the leaſt of theſe my Brethren, ye did it or did it not to me.* For which reaſon 1 St. *Pet.* 4. 8. tells us, that *Charity ſhall cover a multitude of faults*; and on much the ſame account St. *Paul* affirms, that *if he had all Faith and had not Charity, it would not profit him any thing*; and in that ſame Chapter prefers it before Faith and Hope too, ſaying, that *the greateſt of theſe is Charity.*

Now what Interpretation can we reaſonably put on theſe, and many more ſuch paſſages? I know very well what the Papiſts ſay of them; but they carry the matter too high, building no leſs than the Doctrines of Merit and of Works of Supererogation thereon. And even ſome of the later Fathers have Paſſages that look a little this way, being miſled, I ſuppoſe, by ſome Miſtranſlations in the Vulgar Latin.

But ſure there are others who have run into a contrary Extream, and as much derogated from the Scripture Doctrine and account of Charity, as theſe have added to it. Such are they who depreciate Charity ſo far, as to put it on the level with every other Chriſtian Duty; who place no more of Religion in it, than they do in

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Patience, Humility, Hope, Resignation to God's Will, and the like; who say that Works of Charity are of no avail in the sight of God, and that if a Man have no Charity nor good Works, that yet if he have but Faith, that that alone is as much as the Gospel makes necessary.

But sure this is not to interpret but slight the Scripture; 'tis to overlook the current drift and constant design of it, which is to make *Love* not only an Essential part, but the very Life and Soul of Religion it self. For if it be the whole of what the Law and Gospel both require, if it be the Badge and Character of the Christian Doctrine, if it be the distinguishing Mark of Christ's Disciples, and in fine, if it cover our Sins and save our Souls, as is in more than twenty places affirm'd of it, or to this purpose, then sure is it of the greatest importance and of the highest avail to us. To say that any Man can be Good without he is Charitable, or that any one is so Good and Religious as he that is Charitable, or lastly, that the Charitable Man is not Good and Religious, is to contradict the Text, to contradict our Saviour, to contradict the Prophets, Apostles, and in short the whole current of sacred Writ. The Reasons why the Scriptures place so much of Religion in this Vertue may probably be these.

1. Because 'tis the most comprehensive Vertue of any other, as including the Love both of God and our Neighbour, and as that Love is the principle of all the Duties and Services we respectively owe them.

2. Because that by doing Good and being Charitable, we the nearest resemble and imitate God, who is not only in himself, but so own'd by the very Heathens, *viz.* the Fountain and Author of all Good, and the greatest and most universal Benefactor of Mankind. This is one of the first Ideas we form of God, considered

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relatively with reſpect to us; *viz.* that he *is good to all, and that his tender Mercies are over all his Works*; and ſuch an imitation of the Deity did the Heathens take Beneficence, Works of Charity and Mercy to be, that whoever was eminent for them, they preſently thought he had ſomething Divine in him, and accordingly rank'd him among the Gods; and our Saviour bids us to follow our Heavenly Father in this thing particularly, *viz. in being merciful.*

Now if it be the moſt God-like to do Good, if Charity and Mercy be the beſt Tranſcripts and Images of the Deity, and that we are moſt perfect when we are moſt Merciful, becauſe we are then moſt like unto God, ſure we need not wonder that ſo much of Religion is made to conſiſt therein.

3. Another Reaſon for this is, that Acts of Mercy and Charity are the moſt ſolemn Acknowledgments and Recognitions of the Mercy and Bounty of God to us, of any we can make; as much beyond all Verbal Thanks and Praiſe, as Deeds are more than Words, and as real Actions exceed empty Sounds and Compliments. The *Jews*, we know, had their Euchariſtical Oblations, whereby they teſtified the great Senſe they had of the Divine Goodneſs to them. We indeed have no ſuch Sacrifices now as ſolemn Parts of our Worſhip, or Acts of our Religion; but then every Poor Man is yet an *Altar* to us, and every *Charity* we give him, is a Sacrifice, which we offer to God by way of ſolemn Thanks and Praiſe for his great Goodneſs to us. And therefore as great a part of Religion as Gratitude to God is, and as great an Inſtance of a truly Devout and Religious Frame and Temper of Mind as that is; juſt ſo great a part of Religion, and ſo great an Inſtance of true Piety and Goodneſs, is Charity and Mercy to the Poor and Diſtreſſed.

And this leads me to the laſt Thing, *viz.* to make ſome Application of the whole, ſuitable to the Deſign of this Sermon.

1. And if Charity and Works of Mercy be ſo great and eſſential part of Religion, then, by the rule of contraries, Uncharitableneſs and Irreligion are things and terms convertible, and that Man can by no means be a good Chriſtian, who is not Charitable. This I take to be a general Rule, and of Eternal Truth; Let the Man's Faith be never ſo eminent, his Chaſtity, Temperance, Zeal and Devotion, never ſo conſpicuous; let him glory in Spiritual Revelations, Myſtical Unions and Heavenly Light, pretend never ſo much to Raptures of Divine Love, and to inward Teſtimonies and Aſſurances of being in a ſtate of Grace: All theſe, and ten times more, are nought elſe but mere Cant and Jargon: If he have not Charity he is nothing for all them; that is, no more a good Man or a good Chriſtian, than *Simon Magus* was, who was ſtill *in the Gall of Bitterneſs, and Bond of Iniquity.* The beſt that can be ſaid of him is, *that he is not far from the Kingdom of Heaven*; that is, not yet near enough to be admitted a Member of it. There is one thing wanting, *viz.* the ſame as in that care; that he muſt be Charitable with what he has, *and give it to the Poor.* Thus the Apoſtle argues, *If we love not our Brother whom we have ſeen, how ſhall we love God whom we have not ſeen?* As if he had ſaid, Piety or Religion to God, and Charity to our Neighbour, go hand in hand; and that Man can have no claim to the one, that is, to the being truly Religious, who is not ſincerely Charitable.

Let thoſe Perſons look to this, who would not by any means paſs for ill Perſons, and yet have few or no good Works of this nature to lay claim to. They may from

from hence ſee, that whatever Hopes they may have, they are certainly falſe; and that if they dye in their Uncharitableneſs, whatever their other pretenſions may be, they may read their Doom in that of our Saviour before-mention'd, *In as much as ye did it not to the leaſt of theſe my Brethren, ye did it not to me.*

2. If Charity and Religion be in a manner the ſame, then hence we ſee what an excellent Religion we have, that it only conſiſts in doing Good; and that when we are ſerving our Neighbour we are ſerving God, and doing the moſt beneficial Service to our ſelves at the ſame time.

3. Let us, from what has been ſaid, learn to be Charitable, to do Good, and freely diſtribute to others, what God has freely imparted to us. Such as are Rich, muſt *be rich in good Works, ready to give, and* even *glad to diſtribute.* They muſt not only do Acts of Charity ſimply conſider'd as ſuch, but, if poſſible, even ſomewhat more; that is, they muſt be Generous and Hoſpitable in their Charities, and find out ways of doing Good, (of which they may meet with enow) that exceed the Bounds of ordinary Charities, and are only ſuited to a large Purſe, and to a more large extenſive Soul. Such as are Poor, and conſequently have but little to give, muſt *be diligent to give gladly of that little*; remembring that even a cup of cold Water had its Reward; and that the Widows Mite was as acceptable an Offering, as *the very great Treaſures of the Rich.*

Such as have no Money, have yet their Time, and Strength, and Labour, and Intereſt, and Advice and Comfort to beſtow, where they are ſenſible they are wanting, and may do Good; and ſcarce the meaneſt moſt abject Creature, but if he pleaſe, might make himſelf uſeful, at one time, in one manner, to ſome Perſon

or other. And I believe every one will joyn with me in this Remark; that as many times very uſeful Deſigns are ſpoil'd and come to nothing, purely for want of ſome publick ſpirited Perſon to appear in, to begin and ſet them forward; ſo that ſome of the moſt noble Charities of the Age, have been perfected only by the Induſtry and Application of ſuch, who were not in Circumſtances to contribute much of their own, more than their bare Induſtry and Application towards them.

And what Comfort may not ſuch People take in ſuch Pious, Charitable and Laudable Works; when they ſee Churches built, Schools and Hoſpitals erected and endowed, and numerous Bodies of Poor fed, cloath'd and taught, all or chiefly by their Management and Care. Such things will contribute more to their eternal Comfort and Honour, than if they left Houſes call'd after their own Names, or any other Monuments of their Temporal Proſperity and Grandeur.

How happy would it be, had we more of this Publick Spirit! We ſhould not be ſo much poſſeſſed with that, which is perhaps one of the greateſt Obſtructions to Charity of any thing elſe, *viz.* to think that what we have is ſo much our own, as that none elſe have the leaſt Intereſt in or Title to it; on the contrary, we ſhould then think as we ought, *viz.* that no one is more than a Truſtee in what he has; that the Poor, the Lame, the Blind and the Miſerable, are all entitled to their reſpective Shares, which if we have fraudulently detain'd, at the great Day, we ſhall have the diſmal Fate of the unjuſt Steward; that is, *to be bound Hand and Foot, and caſt into outer Darkneſs.*

To eſcape which, let us all conſider, that the moſt Poor and Miſerable are Members of the ſame Body with

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our ſelves, and are therefore entitled to our ſympathy and mutual concern for them.

Let us conſider then, that they have the ſame Paſſions, Affections, Fleſh and Blood that we have, and what a deplorable thing we ſhould think it, were it our own caſe, to bear ſo many Wants, Hardſhips, Troubles and Miſeries, that they do.

Conſider further, that they bear the ſame Divine Image with thy ſelf, and that if any Reſpect is to be paid to that, thou canſt not but think it highly indecent to treat them with nought but Careleſneſs and Diſregard.

If this will not affect thee, conſider the Intereſt they have in your and their common Lord and Father, that they are Children of God, and Servants of the moſt High, may be dear and precious in his ſight, and that what is done for or againſt them, he takes entirely to himſelf. If therefore thou haſt any Honour for their Father, any deſire of his Favour, or fear of his Wrath, thou canſt not ſure do leſs than pay ſome tolerable Regard to thoſe who are ſo nearly Related to him, and for whoſe Welfare he has teſtify'd ſo much concern.

If this will not do, conſider then who it is made thee differ from theſe poor Creatures, whether all thou haſt be not the Gift of God, and whether he does not expect the return of thy Acknowledgments this particular way, *viz.* in being Kind and Charitable to them.

If this has no more effect than the reſt, I ſhall add but this one Conſideration farther, that we have but little Time to do Good in, not always Opportunities for it even when we have Inclination; that we who have Abilities now may not keep them long; at leaſt that we are dying, decaying Creatures, and that *there is no*

Work, nor Device, nor doing Good in the Grave whither we are going. So that if we do not that Good, we are now able to do, we may wiſh we had when it will be too late; and give me leave to obſerve, that it will afford but a Melancholick Reflection when we come to dye, to think that we have done little or no Good to any but our ſelves; that we have been in a manner uſeleſs in our Generation, as to any kind Offices of Goodneſs and Mercy done by us; and that inſtead of making to our ſelves ſuch Friends of our unrighteous Mammon, as may receive us into everlaſting Habitations, we have entail'd on us the Curſe of the poor Widows and Orphans, and have left few or none behind to bleſs us, but rather to have our Name in perfect deteſtation.

I ſhall conclude all, with a word or two, relating to a particular Charity, not many Years ſince, ſet up in this Pariſh and Neighbourhood, and that is, the Poor Children who are Taught and Cloath'd, ſolely at the Charge and by the Induſtry of ſome well-diſpoſed Perſons in this Neighbourhood.

I need ſay the leſs in this caſe, as having been already ſo large on the Subject of Charity in general; for I am ſure no one Conſideration urg'd on that Head, but will be equally ſtrong in this particular Caſe, and that with ſome Advantage. Beſides, this Charity is ſo very conſpicuous, that it commends it ſelf; and therefore like other things of the ſame nature, neither needs nor admits of many Arguments to recommend it. I ſhall only therefore ſay, that of all the known and publick Charities in being from my very Conſcience, I hardly know one, more commendable, more uſeful, and more deſerving Encouragement and Continuance than this does.

does. For to take from the Kennel, the Dunghil, the Rags and Naſtyneſs, the Idleneſs, Wickedneſs and Ignorance of the Age, and not only to relieve from that apparent Ruin which all theſe occaſion, but to put them in a way of being Men and Women uſeful in their Generation, is, ſure, one of the beſt Deeds that can be done. 'Twas therefore a Noble Undertaking at firſt, when it was enter'd upon, and not brought to that Perfection it is without more than ordinary Pains, Charge, and Difficulty. And now when the greateſt Difficulties are over, what pity is it that it ſhould drop, when one might almoſt begin to expect ſome viſible good Fruits and Effects of it; and yet, for ought I underſtand, drop it muſt, if there be not either larger Subſcriptions to Support it, or that the periodical Quarterly Collections do not improve.

For God's ſake then, now ſo Good and Worthy a Work is begun, do not permit it to miſcarry and come to nothing: If ever you ſpar'd a Weeks or a Nights Expence for any other Charity, think it not amiſs to do the like here; and though you may have a conſtant ſettled current for your ordinary Charities, yet ſure for ſuch an extraordinary one as this, you may fairly, nay, pardon me for ſaying it, you ought to go out of your way: Becauſe none of thoſe ordinary Charities, which take up the whole of what your Circumſtances will bear, can be ſuppos'd to be near ſo commendable a Charity as this is.

If then there be any of you, who were ſo unhappy as to want even the firſt Rudiments of Letters and Education, you being ſome judges of its Worth by your own want of it, will not I hope be inſtrumental in laying theſe Poor Children under the ſame Diſadvantage:

And the reſt of you who had better Fortune, by being taught to Write and Read, are much better judges of its Worth ſtill; and therefore, I would flatter my ſelf, will do ſomething more than ordinary, that theſe Poor Children may have the ſame Advantage.

Such of you who are really unable to contribute with your Purſe, muſt lend your aſſiſtance ſome other way; and if your Friends or Acquaintance can do any thing, fail not to interpoſe your good Offices on this occaſion: Then will your own Conſciences approve you, all good People applaud you, the Poor Children may live to return it to you or yours, for ought you know; God himſelf will proſper you, and Generations to come will call you Bleſſed.

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